

Torture Convicts in the Southern Prison Camps

By CYRIL BRIGGS.

One of the most typical institutions of capitalist America is a system of convict labor so horrible and revolting, in the admission even of boss newspaper correspondents, that it has no equal in blood-curdling horror and disgust in all the annals of recorded history. For comparison admits Robert N. Webb, in the New York Graphic of March 21, 1931, one must turn to "the human treadmill of pre-civilized days." Not even the horrors of chattel slavery (supposedly abolished in the United States), the cruelties of mediaeval society nor the horrible tortures of the inquisition conducted by "the holy Roman Catholic Church" against the heretics can afford comparison.

Fantastic as are the imaginary horrors conjured up by the imperialist liars for the Soviet Union lumber camps in their vicious campaign of lies against the Workers Republic, not even the fetid, filthy minds of the most degenerate of these shameless liars could conjure up anything approaching the horrible details, the inhuman brutalities and murderous tortures of the extensive convict labor system in the United States—paradise of the capitalists.

Describing the convict caravans in which the victims, mostly Negro workers, of capitalist brutality, are taken to the scenes of their exploitation, Webb writes:

"A prison on wheels! Steel cages packed with sweeping humanity under a blazing Florida sun! Prisoners on parade!

"On rolls this strange caravan—horrible, revolting! The whine of its iron wheels grinding through the scorching sand rasps cruelly upon a watcher's nerves—reminding him of nothing so much as of the human treadmill of pre-civilized days.

Instituted Under Florida Law

"It is a weird spectacle, fantastic, unbelievable—a spectacle that the greatest showman who ever lived should never have conceived. Strange and nerve-chilling exhibits have filled his iron cages, but had P. T. Barnum attempted such a display as daily rolls through the backlands of Florida, he would have been driven from the country. Yet it is countenanced under the majesty of a Florida law:" (Just as the African dodger game is permitted at Coney Island, in the State of New York).

The men are forced to work 12 hours a day at the most terrific speed-up, with armed guards driving them on and savagely beating them up or even shooting them down at the slightest sign of revolt.

"And at dusk, when their work is done, and the sun is sinking low in the west over the tops of swaying pine trees, turning the sky into a brilliant polychrome, these men, like animals are put back into their cage."

They are forced to sleep on iron "beds" covered only with a piece of canvas. Eighteen are put into one of these cages, hardly larger than the average cell meant for one. They are chained to their bunks and locked in. The cage is too far in the woods to return to the prison camp. But the guards may go, leaving no one to aid if a prisoner is bitten by a snake, or scorpion, or becomes violently ill, as often happens.

"Scorpions, mosquitoes, any kind of bug, can readily get into the cage. Snakes can glide through the narrow grating. There is no way for the prisoner to protect himself. He can move one way or another but a few inches. But thus he is left!"